

Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Relations Committee

Creative Scotland – Regular Funding 2018-21

Written submission from GMAC Film

Background to GMAC Film

For thirty-five years GMAC Film has been working to enable young people from diverse backgrounds to learn about film, and take part in and make films. The underpinning ethos behind all GMAC Film activities is equality of opportunity and removing barriers to participation.

Our target groups are:

- People from the top 15% areas of multiple deprivation
- Women and girls
- People living with a disability
- People from ethnic minority communities
- Care experienced young people and young carers

Through its youth programme, GMAC Film has developed a ‘community development’ model of recruitment. This has proved successful with over 75% of participants on GMAC Film youth projects coming from target groups.

All youth programmes at GMAC Film are free at the point of delivery and we ensure all activities on offer are relevant to the target audience by placing young people at the heart of their design and planning.

This innovative approach has been rolled out to all GMAC Film projects, ensuring that the recruitment framework reaches out to under-represented groups where they live and work.

This open-door policy has led to a high number of people from Glasgow’s most deprived areas and under-represented communities being involved in all areas of GMAC Film.

By understanding and removing barriers to participation we believe we can contribute to the diversification of Scotland’s creative industries and increase the equality of opportunity for all.

Regular Funding Applications

Over the years since the inception of Creative Scotland we have applied for regular funding on three occasions – each time unsuccessfully. After our unsuccessful application in 2014 we spent a great deal of time, and scarce financial resources, examining the comments, and explored ways in which we could improve on what we were portraying, and indeed on what we were doing, and also assessing our needs very carefully. GMAC Film currently only receives core funding from Glasgow City Council, through their Integrated Grant Fund but that is only £25,000; we also

generate funds by renting out space to film and arts related bodies in our Glasgow premises at Trongate 103. The rest of our funding is project related, with only a tiny percentage being allowed to go towards overheads. In the current financial climate it is becoming increasingly difficult for organisations like GMAC Film who are dealing with disadvantaged people to continue to deliver valuable projects. *Mad About Movies* is an important example – it has always been, and must continue to be free at the point of delivery. This particular programme has benefited about four hundred young people each year – some of whom continue on to the *BFI Film Academy* (another project GMAC Film delivers). Some of the graduates of the BFI Film Academy go on to study at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland and other HE and FE institutions while others gain paid internships with GMAC Film on CPD productions for other third sector companies – this is a genuine pathway for young people to gain a livelihood in the screen industries. If people from diverse backgrounds are not able to take part in these kinds of initiatives, the aims of the Scottish Government to have equality of opportunity for all in the arts will never be achieved.

This is the key reason that GMAC Film spent the time and money in putting together a really strong application to become a Regularly Funded Organisation, and why we continue with our fight to survive.

The Process of applying for Regular Funding

As a matter of policy we are in regular contact with the specialism leads at Creative Scotland, as well as with other stakeholders in the company – eg the Robertson Trust, Resilient Scotland, Glasgow Life etc. – and quite naturally we talked to CS about the possibility of applying for Regular Funding for the period 2018 – 21. Whilst we have now been informed that Creative Scotland staff will never encourage an organisation to make application, we were certainly not discouraged from applying, indeed we were under the impression that we had been receiving encouragement.

We feel sure that all the members of your committee will have seen the application form, and will therefore realise the amount of information and work that is required to complete it – we estimate that various members of staff, and members of the board were working on elements of the application for approximately four to five months between the call for applications in November 2016 and the deadline in April 2017. The application also requires a full business plan, and we employed a company to collaborate with us on producing a very well researched business plan – taking account of the feedback that we had received on our previous application. The consultant cost was £10,000. We estimate that the cost of the staff time was in the region of £12,000 - £15,000. Therefore, a total of £22K – £25K was invested by us in this exercise. We were applying for £330,000 over three years (less than 0.029% of the total amount distributed by CS): Year one - £130K; Year two - £110K and Year three - £90K – the plan showing that GMAC Film would become increasingly sustainable over that period of time.

The time spent by staff was additional to their already very packed schedules, which is true of all applications that we make to Creative Scotland or other funding bodies – this was reason for applying to become a Regularly (or Core) Funded Organisation. Without unrestricted funding, like most third sector companies, we do not have the capacity for “blue-sky” thinking, developing new ideas and the innovative

programmes that are essential to enabling the increase in equality and diversity being called for by the film and television industries – not to mention the ambitions of the Scottish Government.

Our business plan very clearly showed that we would be in a financially precarious situation at the end of this financial year, but in November 2016 we felt that risk was worth taking, since we would know the result of the application in October 2017, giving us a full six months to modify our ambitions or pursue alternative options if we did not receive the full amount of funding requested, which we thought might be the outcome. As the CTEER Committee has already heard, the decisions were delayed several times, and not finally announced until mid-January.

(It is important to note that one of the restrictions put on Companies applying to become regularly funded is that they cannot also apply to the Open Project Fund – so we delayed submitting an application for one of our projects “Little Pictures” as it formed a part of our RFO application.)

When we received the news that we were not to become an RFO, and looked at the feedback report, we were surprised to read that “*FUNDING IS RECOMMENDED AT THE AMOUNT REQUESTED*”, by the Creative Scotland assessor.

However, the final recommendation stated “*Although GMAC Film was assessed as fundable, in the context of demand outstripping available funding it has not been possible to fund them at this stage. GMAC Film has not been prioritised as there was a strategic need to keep available funding focused on maintaining existing screen venues, access to cultural cinema experiences, and audience development*”

We also looked at the numeric scores and realised that these were inaccurate – some numbers had been left out completely and some were inconsistent with the words. But it certainly looked like the total score should have been 53 rather than 43. However, the system of scoring also looked as if it was inconsistent, and was unexplained.

Below is a copy of the e-mail letter that I sent to the Chief Executive of Creative Scotland following the receipt of the feedback;

“Dear Janet Archer,

Following your appearance on the Janice Forsyth show on 31st January, I just wanted to say that It is heartening to hear your willingness to listen to the sector and our voices regarding the decisions made. However, I was truly disappointed that no mention was made of Screen, or the lack of funding for any screen businesses apart from the four awards to the exhibition sector. We assume that your emergency Board Meeting was to consider the implications for those applicants who were recommended for funding, but then fell at the last fence. GMAC Film was recommended by the assessor at the amount requested but not recommended by the specialist team with the comment:

“GMAC Film has not been prioritised as there was a strategic need to keep available funding focused on maintaining existing screen venues, access to cultural cinema experiences, and audience development.”

We at GMAC Film have complete sympathy with that aim, but question how some of the other aims of Creative Scotland are to be met (particularly as this is the Year of the Young Person), if companies like GMAC Film no longer exist. We prioritise young people from diverse, disadvantaged backgrounds and are leaders in the encouragement of diversity and equality both on screen and behind the camera, both of which – as we understand it – are priorities for Creative Scotland. We have been recognised in the Assessment of our application as:

“A valuable and unique organisation providing key services in the Glasgow region and elsewhere: film education, skills and talent development, promotion and leadership of equalities, diversity and inclusion in the Screen Industries, a hub for new and aspiring filmmakers.”

Over the 35 years of our existence we have nurtured and mentored many household names working in the industry now – eg David McKenzie, Ciara Barry, Atta Yaqub, Rosie Crerar, Zam Salim, Lucinda Broadbent, Kevin Main, Aimara Reques, Stephen Thomson and Raisah Ahmed. We have enabled young people to watch films, learn the skills to make films, and then to make them – films that they have written, directed, produced and acted in. All of our projects are free at the point of delivery, so that no young person is discriminated against by inability to pay. This is genuine equality of opportunity!

As a producer, I always endeavoured to give opportunities to new and talented crew and actors, but the industry is now so risk averse that it is increasingly difficult for first time young people to get opportunities. If GMAC Film is unable to continue (our business plan projections clearly show just how crucial Regular Funding is for us) who will take on the mantle of championing equality of opportunity and diversity of new entrants, and where will the next David McKenzie, Aimara Reques or Rosie Crerar come from?

The Board of GMAC Film feels that it was encouraged to submit an application to become a Regularly Funded Organisation, spent a great deal of Staff and Board time in preparing a good, solid application and business plan, which clearly showed that without any core funding the company would cease to be viable. The company has in fact done slightly better than predicted, and can survive for another couple of months, but beyond that there can be no future.

I am meeting Creative Scotland on Friday 9th February to discuss the seriousness of the situation that we face at GMAC Film, and I trust that they will have some ideas as to how we might proceed, and most importantly, the ability to assist us financially.

I very much look forward to your comments.”

Creative Scotland said in reply to my letter

“We value highly GMAC’s work and regret that we are unable to provide support for this through our Regular Funding route: as described in the assessment, the limited regular funds available were sufficient only to support access to cultural cinema experiences and audience development, predominantly at levels lower than requested, and it was not possible to support GMAC in addition.”

It is worth noting that only four organisations with the “Screen” designation received funding – all in the exhibition sector.

One of the points that I made in my letter to Janet Archer was the fact that Creative Scotland felt there was a need to focus on the Exhibition Sector, which we take issue with – particularly in the year of the Young Person, when the work that we do is aimed at young people, particularly those who are vulnerable, and disadvantaged. We are providing opportunities for young people, who would not otherwise have them, to see films and discuss them, and learn the skills required to make their own films, and even eventually find employment in the industry.

After the Fact

Immediately following the announcement of awards, I submitted a FOI request to see a full list of bodies/individuals who had submitted applications to become or remain RFOs. In the response I was told that this was being denied, since that information was “commercially sensitive”. That answer is completely unsatisfactory.

We have had a couple of meetings with Creative Scotland since then, and have stressed that without the commitment of funding from them, GMAC Film will have to consider its future. The suggestion made by Janet Archer of applying to the Open Fund (see her letter below)* is not an option – any funding coming from that source is restricted to delivering whichever project it relates to; only thirty percent of applications are successful; and decisions take three months. Added to this, making the application would take at least a month to write sufficiently well to be considered. And most importantly of all project funding – ie restricted funding is not what GMAC Film needs. We are very well aware that because the current financial climate, all charities working as we do with vulnerable people, who are not able to pay for our services, need to find other ways of becoming sustainable. We are working on this – looking for sponsorship, donation schemes etc, as well as maximising the income we generate from our facilities at Trongate 103, and also in making videos for other third sector companies. But all of this takes time, and currently like many of the organisations who were rejected, time is something that we genuinely do not have.

Creative Scotland wrote:-

**“With regard to the Screen Unit, GMAC’s work does indeed have the potential to make a significant contribution to the Unit’s objectives, and Creative Scotland officials will doubtless discuss this with you on Friday; however, allocation of Screen Unit funds cannot commence until April 2018. It is also important to repeat, as discussed with you in previous meetings with Creative Scotland officials, that it would be difficult in the current context, in the absence of other major funders or income, for Creative Scotland to become the principal source of funding support, and would do little to reduce GMAC’s vulnerability. Whilst we appreciate that you seek revenue support from Creative Scotland, you may wish to consider applying again to our Open Project Fund: our records show that you haven’t applied to this fund for any activities since autumn 2015.*

Finally, I would emphasise once again the esteem in which we hold GMAC’s work, as expressed in the Regular Funding assessment, and we hope that we can help

GMAC establish a firmer foundation for development in future. I look forward to hearing the outcome of your meeting on Friday."

Please note, we also take exception to the claim that Creative Scotland has ever been a major Funder of GMAC Film. During the years 2010 – 2017 GMAC Film's total income was £2,179,250 – of which £283,219 (project funding) came from Creative Scotland i.e. just under 13% over the seven-year period.

However, having pointed out these misunderstandings, we are continuing our dialogue with Creative Scotland in good faith, following submitting a costed survival package to them, but have been told that no firm commitment can be made until the start of the next financial year. If no funding is forthcoming within the next couple of weeks then the Board of Directors of GMAC Film, will have to consider whether it can continue trading. If this is the outcome for GMAC Film, it is hard to see how there can ever be "*A FAIRER AND SMARTER SCOTLAND*".

Some General Comments

Regarding the recommendation that we apply for Open Project Funding – I would like to reiterate that the time-scale involved in doing this too long for GMAC Film at this point. We feel sure this will be the case for many of the companies who were rejected.

We would also like to question why CS has prioritised funding of some of Scotland's Umbrella Organisations eg. Creative Edinburgh over Companies like GMAC Film. **We** are working directly with disadvantaged and diverse young people, helping them to acquire skills – both specifically in the screen sector, but also contributing soft skills enabling them to lead fuller, and more confident lives, enabling them to become more employable.

In terms of the new Screen Unit, there has still been no firm indication of when it will be fully operational, which makes one wonder how long it will take for other avenues of funding to be available. We are also extremely concerned that whoever is finally appointed to be the Chief Executive of the Unit will have the kind of autonomy expected by a person who has, as Iain Munro from Creative Scotland said to your committee, international screen industry credibility. We cannot envisage that type of person wanting to have their hands tied by having to consult not just one, but two layers of bureaucracy before making any meaningful decisions.

It is also worrying that Scottish Enterprise (as one of the main partners in the new Unit) has so little understanding of the way in which the Screen Industries operate – as mentioned by David Strachan of Tern Television at your Committee on 22nd March. Production Companies have always had relatively small numbers of permanent staff members – growing to many hundreds for the period of actual production, then going back down to the core staff whilst in development.

This same fact makes it difficult in terms of SDS and apprenticeship schemes. As David Strachan said the industry does create employment, but it is rarely permanent – but it is recurring – and can provide a reasonable living.